

Benzodiazepines for Veterans with PTSD and Substance Abuse

In 1990, an alert to VA physicians warned against using benzodiazepines (BZ's) (Valium-like tranquilizers), for veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Substance Abuse because BZ's may induce violent behavior and readdiction. In a follow up study of 370 hospitalized veterans with PTSD, VISN 1 MIRECC Investigators found that substance abusers were half as likely to be treated with BZ's and use of BZ's did not lead to increased violence or substance abuse relapse in this carefully chosen group. Nine-tenths of these patients received either antidepressants or BZ's for their PTSD. BZ's were used for patients with more severe PTSD, greater disability and fewer alcohol problems. Patients as a group improved over time and BZ-treated patients used significantly less outpatient care following hospital discharge. Along with co-authors Alan Fontana, Ph.D., Michael Sernyak, M.D. and Robert Rosenheck, M.D., Dr. Kosten concludes that benzodiazepines did not undermine treatment outcome and even reduced health care use when used in selected veterans with PTSD and substance abuse.